

Saint Augustine of Hippo, Arithmology, and the  
Numerical Structure of the *Confessions*

An Honors Thesis

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### Abstract

Arithmology, in the form of Scriptural exegesis and mathematical metaphor, appears quite frequently in the texts of Saint Augustine. Although the *Confessions* appears to be mostly exempt from this claim, the structure of the work strongly suggests an arithmetical completeness and return to beginning. As this idea can only be understood in light of the arithmology developed in Augustine's other works, its discussion is preceded by a survey of the great saint's other volumes.

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## Introduction

Saint Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430), like many of the Fathers of the Church, often commented in considerable detail on the various numbers found in Sacred Scripture. Augustine, especially, also makes common use of arithmetic truths in illustrating higher, divine truths. Yet this method of numerical exegesis and metaphor, which shall be referred to as arithmology, has received little sympathetic study in modern times.<sup>1</sup> This scholarly inattention is unfortunate, for Augustine's arithmological metaphors afford insight into his theology and provide promise of a clearer understanding of his writings. In fact, Augustine relates these arithmetic metaphors to the structure of his thought and texts:

And now a word about the reasons for putting these numbers in the Sacred Scriptures. Someone else may discover other reasons, and either those which I have given are to be preferred to them, or both are equally probable, or theirs may be even more probable than mine, but let no one be so foolish or absurd as to contend that they have been put in the Scriptures for no purpose at all, and that there are no mystical reasons why these numbers have been mentioned there. But those which I have given have been handed down by the Fathers with the approval of the Church, or I have gathered them from the testimony of the divine Scriptures, or from the nature of numbers and analogies. No sensible person will decide against reason, no Christian against the Scriptures, no peaceful man against the Church.<sup>2</sup>

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1. William G. Most, "The Scriptural Basis of St. Augustine's Arithmology," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 13 (July 1951): 284. Specifically, Most observes that Augustine's arithmology is brushed aside "as mere 'Pythagoreanism in the air'."

2. Saint Augustine, *The Trinity* (4.6.10), trans. Stephen McKenna, *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, no. 45 (Washington: CUA Press, 1963), 144.

Indeed, if the Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Ghost to accurately record factual events, as all orthodox Christians believe, then ascribing some supernatural meaning to the numbers that appear in them is appropriate. Thus concluding that God has seen fit to deliver divine truth through certain arithmetical figures, a theologian is in turn well justified in using the example of arithmetical truth to praise the magnificence of God. Once this is understood, one must see the immense value in studying the arithmological thought of the Church Fathers, who hold a most eminent place in the canon of Christian thought.

Any essay on arithmology proceeds from a discussion of mathematics. Certainly, Augustine discusses throughout his writings the significance of arithmetic. Empirically and intellectually, computation can be verified. Belief in God, on the other hand, eludes empirical validation. The harmony inherent in God extends to His creation, and mathematics reflects this balance and manifests divine balance. Through an examination of other writings by Augustine, one will see the relationship between the validity of mathematics and the nature of divinity in Augustine's attempts to demonstrate the presence of God in human existence.

Mathematics, though, extends beyond an *objet de connaissance*. Augustine records his progression of intellectual development and spiritual awareness in his *Confessions*. As numerical relationships reflect the nature of God and his creation, arithmology seems to structure this text. Admittedly, Augustine does not detail in this autobiography the meaning of numbers and, in fact, appears to realize that such a subject

does not lend itself to metaphysical or theological explorations. but numerical relationships and their symbolism seem to frame this personal account, enabling Augustine to weave the supernatural meaning of Scriptural numbers into the thirteen books of the *Confessions* and to reinforce his thoughts on the personal relationship between God as Creator and man as His creation.

## I. Justification of Augustine's Arithmology

In spite of the great insight into Sacred Scripture and divine truth which the science would later give him, the childish Augustine failed to be captivated by the study of mathematics. Indeed, he exhibited a profound disinterest towards his entire schooling, writing in the *Confessions*, “In boyhood itself, . . . I did not like my school work, and I detested being pushed into it. Nevertheless, I was pushed, and that was well done for me, but I did not do well. I would not have learned, had I not been forced.”<sup>3</sup> Augustine singles out an arithmetical song as an example of his educational apathy when he states, “Then, indeed, 'one and one are two, two and two are four' was a hateful sing-song, but very attractive was the vain image of a wooden horse filled with armed men, and the burning of Troy, and 'the shade of Creusa herself.’”<sup>4</sup>

Augustine's views towards education would later change. He describes his desire to do well in his university studies at Carthage, where rhetoric was his principal subject, by writing, “I was studying the books of oratory, in which I was eager to excel, because of a detestable and empty purpose, a joy in human vanity.”<sup>5</sup> This vanity, which fueled Augustine's studies, also explains his youthful interest in numerology, astrology, and

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3. Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (1.12.19), trans. Vernon J. Bourke, *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, no. 21 (Washington: CUA Press, 1963), 19-20.

4. Ibid. (1.13.22), 23. Augustine's final quotation refers to Vergil's *Aeneid*.

5. Ibid. (3.4.7), 54.



similar patterns of divination which supposedly give their followers some otherwise hidden knowledge.

Augustine's interest in such occult arts must be distinguished by his later arithmology. He refers to these former false disciplines as "sacrilegious rites," and in particular says that the offerings of numerologists consist of "lying divinations and unholy aberrations."<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere, Augustine calls astrology a "dangerous superstition" and denounces astrologers:

These might search after and sometimes even trace out the exact location of the stars at the time of anyone's birth. Yet, when they try to foretell from that source either our actions or the effects of them, they stray very far from the truth and offer a wretched slavery to unlearned men. For, whenever a free man enters the home of an astrologer like this, he pays in money in order that he may leave as the slave of Mars or Venus, or of all the stars.<sup>7</sup>

This complaint against astrology as a science that enslaves the ignorant, however, diverges from the intellectual validity of arithmology. Whereas astrology and similar arts purportedly reveal facts hidden in the stars or some other medium, arithmology studies the meaning of the numbers which visibly appear in Sacred Scripture. It is true that for those who, as Augustine says, are ignorant of "the science of numbers,"<sup>8</sup> this meaning

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6. Ibid. (10.35.56), 313; (7.6.8), 170

7. Saint Augustine, *Christian Instruction* (2.21.32), trans. John J. Gavigan, *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, no. 2 (Washington: CUA Press, 1947), 89.

8. Saint Augustine, *Letters* (3), vol. 1, trans. Wilfrid Parsons, *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, no.12 (Washington: CUA Press, 1951), 8.

may be obscured, but to use a modern example, it is no more hidden than the process of cellular mitosis is hidden to a person that is ignorant of the science of biology.

Still, a common complaint against this arithmology is its pagan origins.<sup>9</sup> While the influence of Platonism on Augustine is well documented, he was not so captivated by it that he was unaware of its incompatibilities with Christian belief. In *The Retractions*, composed 426-27,<sup>10</sup> Augustine writes in reference to his earlier treatise *On the Academics* (386):

I have been right displeased, too, with the praise with which I extolled Plato or the Platonists or the Academic philosophers beyond what was proper for such irreligious men, especially those against whose great errors Christian teaching must be defended.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, he expresses remorse for praise given in his treatise *On Order* (386) to Pythagoras, a precursor of Plato who particularly stressed the importance of mathematics to his followers:

I regret, too, that I bestowed so much praise on the philosopher, Pythagoras, with the result that anyone who hears or reads can think that I believed that there are no errors in the teachings of Pythagoras although there are many errors, and fundamental ones.<sup>12</sup>

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9. Most, 284.

10. Jacques Chabannes, *St. Augustine*, trans. Julie Kernan (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1962), 237-39. All subsequent dates of composition also refer to this source.

11. Saint Augustine, *Retractions* (1.1.4), trans. Mary Inez Bogan, *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, no. 60 (Washington: CUA Press, 1968), 10.

12. Ibid. (1.3.3), 15.

Thus one can see that Augustine was well aware that the teachings of these pagan philosophers could not simply be restated as Christian teaching. In any case, the survey of Augustine's arithmological thought which follows shows that there is nothing in it opposed to the Christian faith, and that, in fact, it justifies Solomon's praise that God "hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight."<sup>13</sup>

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13. Wisd. 11.21 (Douay-Rheims Version).

## II. Survey of Augustine's Arithmology

As noted at the beginning of this essay, Augustine's arithmology is constructed from two mostly distinct elements, numerical exegesis and metaphor. The numerical exegesis ascribes meaning to the numbers that appear in Sacred Scripture based on their arithmetical properties. This is particularly true for the following numbers, which occur most frequently in Augustine's writings.

### *One*

In a letter to his friend Nebridius (387), Augustine writes of the number one, that “whoever understands the science of numbers puts his satisfaction in the number one, and no wonder, because from it he can form others for his delectation.”<sup>14</sup> Augustine discusses this concept of one as the construct for all other numbers elsewhere where he writes in *The Free Choice of the Will* that “no matter what the number, it is so designated according to the number of times it contains the number one.” He goes on to explore the bodily imperceptibility of this number, a fact on which much of his numerical metaphor is based:

But anyone with a true notion of “one” will doubtless discover that it cannot be perceived by the bodily senses. Whatever comes in contact with the bodily senses can be shown to be many, and not one, since, being a body, it also has numberless parts. . . .

. . . Wherever it is that I come to know one, I certainly do not know it by the bodily senses, for by these I know only bodies, which, as we have shown, are not one, truly and simply. Furthermore, if we have not perceived one by the bodily sense, then neither have we perceived any number by them, none at least of those numbers which we can discern with the understanding. For there is not one

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14. *Letters* (3), 8.

of them that does not get its name from its being a given multiple of one, which is not perceived by the bodily senses.<sup>15</sup>

The fact that one, and thus all other numbers, is not perceived by any bodily sense is a fact on which many of Augustine's arithmetical metaphors rest. This concept is explored much more fully below.

### *Three*

The number three, as one might expect, represents the triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Augustine does not give particular importance to this number for any arithmetical reason, but its relation to the Trinity suggests its significance. It is observed, then, that the number three does not give glory to God, but that God gives glory to the number three.

The number three also reveals a slight resemblance between the Trinity and mankind. According to Augustine:

We ourselves can recognize in ourselves an image of God, in the sense of an image of the Trinity. Of course, it is merely an image and, in fact, a very remote one. There is no question of identity nor co-eternity nor, in one word, of consubstantiality with Him. Nevertheless, it is an image which by nature is nearer to God than anything else in all creation, and one that by transforming grace can be perfected into a still closer resemblance.

For, we are, and we know that we are, and we love to be and to know that we are. And in this trinity of being, knowledge, and love there is not a shadow of illusion to disturb us. For, we do not reach these inner realities with our bodily senses as we do external objects . . . But, without any illusion of image, fancy, or

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15. Saint Augustine, *The Free Choice of the Will* (2.8.22), trans. Robert P. Russell, *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, no. 59 (Washington: CUA Press, 1968), 130-31.

phantasm, I am certain that I am, that I know that I am, and that I love to be and to know.<sup>16</sup>

The mystery of the Trinity is thus linked to the trinity of being, which is an idea that later appears in Augustine's *Confessions*.

#### *Four*

For Augustine, the number four represents time. He writes that “the course of the day and year are accomplished through the number four; the days are carried through in intervals of hours: morning, noon, evening, and night; the years, by the spring, summer, autumn, and winter months.”<sup>17</sup>

#### *Six*

Six is the first perfect number, as it is the sum of its factors. From this observation, the fact that God created the world in six days signifies the perfection of God's works. In the *City of God*, he writes that:

It is recorded that all God's works were completed in six days (the day being repeated six times), because six is a perfect number. Of course, no prolongation of time was necessary for God. He could have at once created all things and then let them measure time by their appropriate movements. It is the perfection of God's work that is signified by the number six. For, this is the first number made up of aliquot parts, a sixth, and third and a half, respectively, one, two and three, totaling six.<sup>18</sup>

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16. Saint Augustine, *City of God, Books VIII-XVI* (11.26), trans. Gerald G. Walsh and Grace Monahan, *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, no. 14 (Washington: CUA Press, 1952), 228.

17. *Christian Instruction* (2.16.25), 84.

18. *City of God, Books VIII-XVI* (11.30), 235.

Again, in order to refute the charge that this arithmology is pagan, it is worth observing that the perfection of the number six is merely a symbol of the perfection of God's works; those works are not said to be made any more perfect by the fact that their creation lasted six days.

### *Seven*

Augustine offers three different meanings for the number seven. First, it represents the creature, or man, “by reason of his life and body. In the case of his life, there are three Commandments to love God with our whole heart, our whole soul, and our whole mind; with regard to the body, there are four very discernible elements of which it is composed.”<sup>19</sup>

The second and third meanings of the number seven given by Augustine are that it represents totality and thus also the Holy Spirit:

Let it suffice to remark that three is the first odd integer; four, the first even integer; seven, the sum of these two. For this reason, it is frequently used to suggest an unlimited number. Thus, the text, 'For a just man shall fall seven times and shall rise again,' means that he will not perish, however often he falls. There is here no question of falling into sins, but of afflictions leading to lowliness. Again we read: 'Seven times a day I have given praise to Thee'; and, in another place, the identical idea differently expressed: 'His praise shall be always in my mouth.' Holy Scripture offers us many such examples in which the number seven, as I have said, is ordinarily used to convey some kind of wholeness or universality.

So, too, the number seven often signifies the Holy Spirit, of whom our Lord said: 'He will teach you all the truth.' For in that Spirit is God's rest in the sense of our rest in God, rest in the Whole, in full perfection.<sup>20</sup>

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19. *Christian Instruction* (2.16.26), 84. Unfortunately for the modern reader, Augustine does not list these “four very discernible elements.”

Of course, it matters little that modern mathematicians do not consider three to be the first odd integer, or four to be the first even integer. The Scriptures were inspired in the midst those who, as is shown by Augustine's reckoning, considered these observations to be true.

### *Eight*

Eight represents the octave, that is, the “return to one” which “is the perfection of our happiness.”<sup>21</sup> Additionally, the representation of the Holy Ghost by the number seven, as described above, has further implications for Augustine in his enumeration of the eight beatitudes given by Christ in His Sermon on the Mount. The beatitudes, as given in Matthew 5.3-11, are said to make up an octave. Augustine explains this idea in a commentary of Christ's Sermon, where he writes:

The eighth maxim returns, as it were, to the beginning: it presents and approves something consummate and perfect. Thus, the kingdom of heaven is named both in the first maxim and in the eighth. In the first: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' And as though in answer to the question: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or the sword'—as though in answer to this question, He says: '*Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*' Therefore, there are seven maxims which constitute perfection, for the eighth starts anew, as it were, from the very beginning: it clarifies and approves what is already complete. Thus, all the other grades of perfection are accomplished through these seven.<sup>22</sup>

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20. *City of God, Books VIII-XVI* (11.31), 237. Augustine quotes, in order, from Proverbs 24.16, Psalms 118.164, Psalms 33.1, and John 16.13.

21. *Letters* (55), vol. 1, 284.

22. Saint Augustine, *Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount with Seventeen Related Sermons* (1.3.10), trans. Denis J. Kavanagh, The Fathers of the



The reduction of the number of beatitudes to seven, then, enables Augustine to show that they correspond to the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost and the seven petitions contained within the Lord's Prayer.<sup>23</sup>

### *Ten*

Ten is another number for which Augustine offers multiple meanings. In that it is the sum of three and seven, it represents the “knowledge of the Creator and the creature,”<sup>24</sup> which follows from the above meanings for three and seven. This joining of the Creator and the creature, like the number eight, is said to signify “the perfection of our happiness.”<sup>25</sup> Secondly, ten is symbolic of “law in general, and the Decalogue in particular.”<sup>26</sup> These two meanings are in no way contradictory, since for the Christian, “perfect happiness” is found in keeping the commandments of God.

### *Eleven*

It is therefore readily understood that, if ten represents the law, as in the last meaning given immediately above, then eleven “stands for a transgression of the law and, therefore, for sin.” According to Augustine:

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Church, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, no. 11 (Washington: CUA Press, 1951), 26. The question mentioned by Augustine was posed by Saint Paul in Romans 8.35.

23. Ibid. (2.11.38), 146-148; Ibid. (2.25.87), 198-199.

24. *Christian Instruction* (2.16.26), 84.

25. *Letters* (55), vol. 1, 284.

26. *City of God, Books VIII-XVI* (15.20), 464.

This explains why the number of haircloth curtains prescribed to cover the top of the tabernacle of the testimony, of that traveling temple, so to speak, of the people of God in their wanderings, was eleven. The haircloth, made of goats' hair, was a reminder of sins because of the goats that were to be kept on the left.

He goes on to note “that the descendants of Adam through Cain, the transgressor, end on the number eleven, the symbol for transgression.”<sup>27</sup>

### *Twelve*

Twelve, like seven, represents totality. Whereas seven is the sum of three and four, twelve is those numbers' product. In particular, twelve can represent a judicial totality. Concerning the twelve thrones on which the Apostles will judge the twelve tribes of Israel, as described by Christ in Matthew 19.28:

Now, we are not to think that, in view of the twelve thrones on which they are to sit, these twelve men alone are to sit in judgment. This number twelve simply stands for some integral fullness of judges, made up as it is of two constituents of seven—a number which generally stands for the whole. Take these two constituents, namely three and four. One multiplied by the other gives us twelve, for four times three and three times four equal twelve. And there may be still other relevant meanings in this number twelve.

If we insist on the literal meaning of 'twelve,' given the fact that the Apostle Matthias was chosen to fill the vacancy left by the traitor Judas, St. Paul who worked harder than any other Apostle would have no judgment seat to sit upon. Yet, he makes it unmistakably clear that he, too, along with the rest of the saints, belongs to the complement of judges, where he says: 'Do you not know that we shall judge angels?'<sup>28</sup>

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27. Ibid. (15.20), 464. The haircloth curtains are prescribed in Exodus 26.7.

28. Saint Augustine, *City of God, Books XVII-XXII* (20.5), trans. Gerald G. Walsh and Daniel J. Honan, *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, no. 24 (Washington: CUA Press, 1954), 258. Augustine quotes Saint Paul in 1 Corinthians 15.10.

In contrast to the transgressive number eleven, Augustine further claims that twelve is significant as the sum of the ten generations from Adam through Seth to Noe and of the two sons of Noe that were righteous.<sup>29</sup> This lawfulness corroborates the above judicial totality of the number.

### *Forty*

The significance of the number forty proceeds from its being the product of four and ten. Augustine describes the importance of this number in his treatise on *Christian Instruction*:

Certainly a sincere nature cannot help being concerned about the significance of the fact that Moses, Elias, and the Lord Himself fasted forty days. The figurative perplexity of this act is solved only by a knowledge and study of this number. It is composed of four times ten; as it were, the knowledge of all things joined together by time. . . . So, while the number ten is being impressed upon us in the sense of time, that is, multiplied by four, we are being instructed to live virtuously and temperately, free from the delights of time.<sup>30</sup>

In reference to the forty-day period between Easter and the Ascension, Augustine elsewhere states “that life itself is represented by the number forty, because the number ten, in which is the perfection of our happiness . . . , is made known in time to the world.”<sup>31</sup> It is thus observed that forty was an appropriate number of days for the resurrected Christ—a unique example of life, and of the perfect happiness awaiting the Christian—to remain on earth.

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29. *City of God, Books VIII-XVI* (15.20), 465.

30. *Christian Instruction* (2.16.25), 83-84

31. *Letters* (55), vol. 1, 284.

### *Fifty*

The number fifty, referring to the number of days between Easter and Pentecost, is close related to that of forty. Not only is fifty the sum of forty and ten, which signifies “the reward of labor and self-restraint,” it can be seen as an octave. Augustine writes that:

There is another mystery connected with the fiftieth day, in the fact that seven times seven makes forty-nine, and when there is a return to the beginning, which is the octave, identical with the first, fifty is complete; and these days after the Lord's Resurrection form a period, not of labor, but of peace and joy. That is why there is no fasting and we pray standing, which is a sign of resurrection.<sup>32</sup>

Augustine also notes that this fifty-day period between Easter and Pentecost is prefigured in the Old Testament:

Therein, fifty days are numbered from the celebration of the pasch by the killing of a lamb, to the day on which the law was given on Mount Sinai to the servant of God, Moses. . . . Thus the two Testaments agree faithfully in proclaiming the sacred truth. A lamb is slain, the pasch is celebrated, and after fifty days the law, written with the finger of God, is given in fear: Christ is slain, who was led 'as a sheep to the slaughter,' as the Prophet Isaias testifies, the true pasch is celebrated, and after fifty days the Holy Spirit, who is the finger of God, is given in love.<sup>33</sup>

Although the length of days between the pasch and giving of the law is not explicitly mentioned in the Book of Exodus, Augustine shows that it does indeed total fifty.<sup>34</sup>

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32. Ibid. (55), 284.

33. Ibid. (55), 285. The lamb and law in the Old Testament are described in Exodus. 12.16 and 19.1-25; Isaias' testimony appears in Isaias 53.7.

34. Ibid. (55), 286-87.

### *One Hundred Fifty-Three*

One hundred fifty-three, the number of fish caught by the disciples after Christ's resurrection, is constructed from the numbers fifty and three:

Where there is rest, there is also sanctification. So, we have now received a pledge that we may love and desire it. To the repose of the other life, to which we pass over from this life—according to the meaning of pasch—all are called 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.'

Therefore, the number fifty multiplied by three, and with that same three added, to exalt the mystery, is found in those 'great fishes,' which the Lord, showing His new life after the Resurrection, commanded to be drawn up from the right side, 'and the net was not broken,' because, then, there will be no unrest of heretics.<sup>35</sup>

Augustine goes on, at some length, to explain the meaning of this one hundred fifty-three as a symbol of a heavenly kingdom by linking that kingdom to the seventeenth psalm, and observing that the sum of the first seventeen integers is one hundred fifty-three.<sup>36</sup>

### *Squared Numbers*

Saint Peter Chrysologus wrote that "perfection is always something squared."<sup>37</sup>

Augustine never makes such an explicit statement in regard to squared numbers. Such an opinion, though, is implied. For example, his observation that the square of twelve, one

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35. Ibid. (55), 287. The first quote is from Matthew 28.19, the latter two are from John 21.6 and 21.11, respectively.

36. Ibid. (55), 287-88.

37. Saint Peter Chrysologus, *Selected Sermons and Letter to Eutyches* (11), trans. George E. Ganss, *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, no. 17 (Washington: CUA Press, 1953), 58.

hundred forty-four, “signifies in the Apocalypse the entire multitude of saints.”<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, it was shown above that the square of seven links the two most important Christian feasts of Easter and Pentecost.

### *Numbers with Multiple Meanings*

Augustine sometimes gives certain numbers more than one meaning. This fact can in no way negate his arithmological symbolism; however, in spite of the possible argument that, by representing more than one object, these symbolic numbers are not authoritative or reliable. Those who would make such an argument would do well to consider the principle symbol of Christianity. The same Cross so cruel and humiliating that Roman citizens were spared from being hung on it was also the means by which the sins of all mankind were made clean. If God, then, can redeem the world through an instrument of death, it matters very little that, for instance, the number seven can represent both humanity and the Holy Ghost.

### *Numerical Metaphor*

In addition to his observations on the arithmetical properties of the numbers that appear in Sacred Scripture, Augustine often utilizes the laws of arithmetic, as well as man's knowledge of them, as metaphors for belief in, and for the characteristics of, God. As we have seen, Augustine considers the number one—the basis of all other numbers—to be imperceivable by the bodily senses. Likewise, excepting a thirty-three year period that ended more than three hundred years before Augustine's birth and any miraculous

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38. *Christian Instruction* (3.35.51), 161.

revelations, God cannot be directly observed with any bodily sense, but all believers nonetheless have faith that he exists.

With regard to the various characteristics of God, Augustine compares His immutability to the immutability of the laws of numbers in his treatise on *Christian Instruction*:

Certainly it is clear to even the most stupid person imaginable that the science of numbers was not ordained by men, but rather investigated and learned by them. Virgil wanted the first syllable of *Italia* long, not short as the ancients pronounced it, and he made it so. No one can decide, however, merely because he desires it, that three times three are not nine, or do not form a square, or are not the triple of the number three, or are not one and one half times six, or that they are the double of some number, since odd numbers do not have a half. Therefore, whether numbers are regarded in themselves or in their application to the principles of figures, sounds, or other movements, they have unchangeable rules. These were not ordained by men in any way, but were learned through the intelligence of clever men.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, as Augustine implies, God—who was not “ordained,” or imagined by man—can also be considered an Immutable Truth, one that is, in fact, higher than the truth of mathematics and, like mathematics, cannot be shaped or molded by the will of men. He makes this comparison explicit elsewhere while arguing against the Manichaeans, the sect to which he once belonged:

If we wish to avoid blasphemy, we must either understand or hold it on faith that God is the supreme good, the being than which nothing better can be or be conceived. There is a certain law of numbers which can in no way be violated or changed, and no nature can, by any amount of force, bring it about that the number coming after one be other than the double of one. It is altogether impossible to change this, yet you speak of God as changeable. The integrity of this law is inviolable, yet, you do not wish to admit as much of God Himself. Let

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39. Ibid. (2.38.56), 109-110. Vergil's *Italia* refers to *Aeneid* 1.2.

the race of darkness take the intelligible number of three, which is so unified that it lacks all parts, and cause it to be divided into two equal parts. Doubtless, your mind perceives that no amount of hostility could bring this about. Then, can what is incapable of violating the law of numbers violate God? If not, why, may I ask, was it necessary that part of Him be mixed with evil and forced to suffer such misery?<sup>40</sup>

Although Augustine's polemic here is against the peculiar theology of the Manichaeans, it can easily be applied to all those who would suggest that God or His laws are malleable.

Augustine further shows God to be omniscient by a numerical argument in the *City of God*, where he writes:

Now, numbers are certainly infinite, for at no matter what number you think you have reached an end, you can not merely add one to this number, but you can multiply it by two or any other number including itself; by the very nature of mathematics it does not matter how big or all-embracing the number may be.

Moreover, by the very nature of numbers no one number can be equal to any other number. The result is that, though taken separately, each number is finite, yet, because they are all unequal and different, taken all together, they are infinite. . . .

Although, then, there is no definite number corresponding to an infinite number, an infinity of numbers is, nevertheless, not incomprehensible to Him of whose intelligence 'there is no number.' It follows, then, that since whatever is comprehended by knowledge is limited by the very comprehension of the one who knows, in some ineffable way, all infinity is made finite by God since in His knowledge it is not incomprehensible.<sup>41</sup>

This example was given by Augustine to refute those that claimed that God's knowledge was finite. It can also be observed that the incomprehensible infinity of numbers is

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40. Saint Augustine, *The Catholic and Manichaean Ways of Life* (2.11.24), trans. Donald A. Gallagher and Idella J. Gallagher, *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, no. 56 (Washington: CUA Press, 1966), 82.

41. *City of God, Books VIII-XVI* (12.19), 279-80. Augustine quotes Psalms 146.5, concerning God's innumerable intelligence, in the final paragraph.



proved to be perceptible by God. Thus the charge that Augustine's arithmology is pagan—that it makes all existence the slave of arithmetic—is again shown to be untrue.

### III. Arithmology in the *Confessions*

In spite of Augustine's considerable attention to numeric meanings throughout his writings, the text of the *Confessions* contains only three metaphors which are numerical in nature. Those which Augustine does use, however, elucidate his story of conversion. In Book Six, Augustine describes the faith in which he was being instructed by Saint Ambrose of Milan:

I was keeping my heart from all assent, fearing a sudden fall, yet by this suspension [of assent] I was, instead, being killed. For, I desired to be as certain of those things which I could not see as I was sure that seven and three are ten. I was not so demented as to think that this proposition could not be comprehended, but I longed for other things to be understood just as this, whether bodily things which were not wholly evident to my senses, or spiritual things of which I was unable to think, unless corporeally.<sup>42</sup>

In light of the explanation of Augustine's definition of the number ten, it is quite interesting that he chose that number, constructed by adding seven and three—“the perfection of happiness” that results from the joining “of the Creator and the creature”—to illustrate his search for faith.

The certainty of mathematics, though, contrasts with the subjectivities of faith. The above passage concerns a period of skepticism and confusion in Augustine's life. He was no longer a follower of Mani's sect and, “having once given rash adherence to Manichaeism, he was hesitant to give intellectual assent to anything.”<sup>43</sup> Indeed, just a

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42. *Confessions* (6.4.6), 136.

43. Frederick Van Fleteren, “*Confessiones*,” in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 230.

few chapters before, Augustine writes, “I was in doubt about all things and took no definite position among all. . . . Therefore, I resolved, for the time being, to be a catechumen in the Catholic Church which had been recommended to me by my parents, until some light of certainty might appear, to which I could direct my course.”<sup>44</sup> Note that this resolution was merely to receive instruction in the Catholic Faith and not towards any definite action; it is quoted above that Augustine was “keeping his heart from all assent” and elsewhere he writes that he had “lost confidence and was in despair of finding the truth.”<sup>45</sup> It is therefore appropriate that he would desire to be as sure in his faith as he was in the sum of seven and three, since not only did he lack assurance, the “perfect happiness” represented by that sum was grievously absent in his life.

Although the numerical metaphor above and those contained in his other works offer a powerful example of the knowledge of God, Augustine differentiates between this knowledge and the knowledge of numbers later in his *Confessions*. For example, in Book Ten, he writes:

Memory contains the reasons and innumerable laws of numbers and dimensions, none of which any bodily sense impresses; for, these are neither colored, nor resonant, nor odorous, nor tasty, nor tangible. I have heard the sounds of words by which they are signified when there is a discussion about them, but these sounds are one thing and objects are another. For, the sounds are different in Greek from what they are in Latin, but the things are neither Greek nor Latin, nor do they belong to any kind of language.<sup>46</sup>

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44. *Confessions* (5.14.25), 127.

45. *Ibid.* (6.1.1), 129

46. *Ibid.* (10.12.19), 279-80.

Augustine signifies the knowledge, or memory, of God as the memory of a “happy life.”<sup>47</sup> Yet concerning the similarities between this memory of God and the memory of numbers, he answers his own rhetorical question quite emphatically: “Is it like the example of our remembering numbers? No!”<sup>48</sup> The difference, Augustine, writes, is that this memory of numbers—like another example he uses here, the memory of the city of Carthage—is that “one who possesses these in knowledge does not seek to obtain further, but we possess the happy life in knowledge, and so we love it, yet wish to attain it further so that we may *be* happy.”<sup>49</sup> That is, the memory of God gives one the desire to be united with Him, a desire without any correlation in the science of numbers. This idea would seem well-represented in the famous lyric that shortly follows this discussion:

Late have I loved Thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved Thee! And behold, Thou wert within and I was without. I was looking for Thee out there, and I threw myself, deformed as I was, upon those well-formed things which Thou hast made. Thou wert with me, yet I was not with Thee.<sup>50</sup>

The knowledge of God is the innermost knowledge a person can have, since it is from God that he came. The knowledge of numbers, although no less imperceivable, has no such generative significance with regard to man.

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47. Ibid. (10.20.29), 289.

48. Ibid. (10.21.30), 290.

49. Ibid. (10.21.30), 290.

50. Ibid. (10.27.38), 297.

The third numerical metaphor in the *Confessions* to be discussed in this essay appears in Book Thirteen of the work, which is a discussion on the Trinity. In spite of some resemblance between the mystery of the Trinity and the trinity of being, Augustine makes a sharp distinction:

Now, I speak of these three: to be, to know, to will. For, I am, I know, and I will. I am a knowing and willing being; I know that I am and that I will; I will to be and to know.

Let him who can, then, see in these three how inseparable life is, for it is one life, one mind, and one essence—in short, how inseparable is the distinction and yet there is a distinction. Each man confronts the evidence within himself; let him pay attention to it within himself, and see it, and tell me about it.

But, when he finds and can speak of something among these things, let him not form the opinion that he has already found that which exists immutably above these things—what is immutably, knows immutably, and wills immutably. Is the Trinity in God because of these three, or are these three in each [Person] in such fashion that all three things belong to each; or is the Selfsame, in the abundant greatness of unity, both wondrously simple and yet multiple, by being unlimited in Itself and yet Its own limit, whereby It is, and is known to Itself, and is immutably satisfying to Itself—who could easily grasp this in cogitation? Who could express it in any way? Who would be so rash as to voice any sort of judgment on it?<sup>51</sup>

Augustine here suggests that the trinity of being is something that can be grasped by examining oneself. And indeed, the Holy Trinity is, knows, and wills. Yet It thus acts immutably in these things, and man, whose knowledge is strictly finite, is incapable of rendering “any sort of judgment” towards the Holy Trinity.

Metaphor invites abstract thought, and Augustine provides two examples of numerical exegesis in the final three books of the *Confessions*. These books, as opposed to the first ten primarily autobiographical books, comprise a commentary on the Book of

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51. Ibid. (13.11.12), 417-18.

Genesis and on the Holy Trinity. Both of these examples are simplistic, the first occurring when Augustine uses his reduced list of seven beatitudes in describing the general vocation of man: “Thou hast called us, so that we may be poor in spirit, meek, mournful, hungry and thirsty for justice, merciful, pure of heart, and peacemakers.”<sup>52</sup> The second such example of numerical exegesis appears when, in Book Thirteen, Augustine writes concerning of the seventh day of creation:

Now, the seventh day is without an 'evening' and has no setting, because Thou hast blessed it unto eternal duration, so that the fact of They resting on the seventh day, after Thy very good works (even though Thou didst perform them while at rest), might, through the voice of Thy Book, be for us a foretelling of this: that we also, after our works, which are only very good because Thou didst grant them to us, shall rest in Thee during the Sabbath of eternal life.<sup>53</sup>

The idea that the seventh day of rest represents totality, or an eternity, complies with the meaning given to the number seven in Augustine's other works.

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52. Ibid. (11.1.1), 328.

53. Ibid. (13.36.51), 455.

#### IV. The Arithmological Structure of the *Confessions*

The previous examples of numerical metaphor and exegesis, admittedly, justify giving only slight arithmological significance to the *Confessions*, especially when compared to the detailed ideas expressed in the *City of God* and several of Augustine's other writings. However, as was stated in the introduction to this essay, it is not the text of the *Confessions* but the structure—that is, the enumeration of its thirteen books—that is arithmologically intriguing. Yet before exploring the possibility of a numerically significant structure in the *Confessions*, one must ask if Augustine would have consciously considered such an idea.

A footnote to the edition of the *Confessions* referenced in this essay mentions that five was a “holy” number for the Manichaeans, the sect to which Augustine once belonged, and to which Augustine wrote five works that attack this heresy.<sup>54</sup> One will therefore observe that Augustine was not above attaching some significance to the enumeration of his works. Although such an observation can hardly, by itself, justify this hypothesis, it does lend some credibility to the idea.

One must also consider Augustine's intentions, if he did, in fact, desire to give the enumeration of the books in the *Confessions* some significance. Obviously, although he was inspired by God to write his theological works, this is certainly not the same type of “inspiration” given to the Biblical Prophets and Evangelists. Augustine's pen was directed entirely by his own will and intellect. Thus his purpose in lending significance to the

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54. Ibid., 106.

thirteen books of the *Confessions* would be only to reinforce his stated meaning, and the goal of the reader in exploring this supposed numerical structure should only be to gain a better understanding of Augustine's philosophies and appreciation for his aesthetics. This is a different aim than one would have in studying the numbers that appear in Sacred Scripture. There, while numbers do indeed reinforce the meaning of the text, the reader must also marvel at the divine orderliness and harmony they represent.

What follows, then, after a few words on the division of the *Confessions*, is a brief book-by-book summary, with commentary on the significance of the book's enumeration where appropriate.

### *The Division of the Confessions*

As has been mentioned several times, the *Confessions* consists of thirteen books. These books are generally regarded to be further divided into either two or three parts.<sup>55</sup> Those who see a two-part division say that Books One through Eight concern Augustine's life prior to his conversion and that Books Nine through Thirteen concern his post-conversion life. The three-part division is the more popular, and its proponents credit Books One through Nine as being about Augustine's past life, Book Ten as being about his present life, and Books Eleven through Thirteen as being a commentary on the first thirty-one verses of Genesis. Neither division is, in fact, exclusive of the other, and both can be said to be true. What is most important is the acknowledgment of the great personal conversion that occurs over the entire volume.

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55. Van Fleteren, 228.



### *Book One*

The biographical elements of Book One, concerning Augustine's youth, are preceded by several chapters in which he contemplates the mystery of God. Among many other questions, Augustine asks: "Who invokes Thee without knowing Thee? For, he who knows Thee not might invoke another being in Thy stead. Or, art Thou rather invoked in order that Thou mayest be known?"<sup>56</sup> Again, he asks:

How shall I invoke my God, my God and Lord, since, when I invoke Him, I call Him into my very self? What place is in me, into which My God may come? Where can God come into me, the God who has made heaven and earth? Is there anything in me, O Lord my God, which can encompass Thee? . . . Since, in fact, I am, why do I ask that Thou shouldst come into me—I, who would not be unless Thou wert in me? For I am not now in hell, and yet Thou art even there. Because, 'even if I descend into hell, Thou art present.'

Hence, I would not be, my God, I would not be at all, unless Thou wert in me.<sup>57</sup>

Both the imperceptibility of God and the existence of God in all creation brings attention to the single conflict that confronts Augustine.. This is similar to the number one, which is imperceptible and exists in all other numbers. While this connection is, perhaps, somewhat tenuous, it is made clearer by the later books of the *Confessions* which refer to this first book.

### *Book Two*

Book Two continues the story of Augustine's youth, but as two is not a particularly significant number, there is no arithmological symbolism in the book.

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56. *Confessions* (1.1.1), 4.

57. Ibid. (1.2.2), 4. Augustine quotes Ps. 138.8 at the end of the first paragraph.

*Book Three*

Book Three narrates Augustine's studies in Carthage. Although he was by no means a Christian at this time, he came to love wisdom and to turn from his "vain hopes":

In the regular course of study, I came upon the book of a certain Cicero, whose tongue nearly all admire, but not his heart. But that book of his contained an exhortation to philosophy. It was called *Hortensius*.

In fact, that book changed my mental attitude, and changed the character of my prayers to Thyself, O Lord. It altered my wishes and my desires. Suddenly, every vain hope became worthless to me and I yearned with unbelievable ardor of heart for the immortality of wisdom. I began to rise up, so that I might return to Thee. . . .

. . . What brought me relish in this exhortation [of Cicero] was that I was excited and aroused and inflamed to love, seek after, attain, and strongly embrace, not this philosophic school, but wisdom itself, whatever it is. The only thing to dim my ardor was the fact that the name of Christ was not there, for this name, by Thy mercy, O Lord, this name of my Saviour, Thy Son, my youthful heart had drunk in piously with my mother's milk and until that time had retained it in its depths; whatever lacked this name could not completely win me, howsoever well expressed, and polished, and true appearing.<sup>58</sup>

This is the first of many conversions in Augustine's life, a series of conversions, which will eventually lead him to the Catholic Faith and its triune God. As such, it is appropriate that this preliminary conversion occurs in Book Three, since three is the number that symbolizes where his faith will ultimately lay.

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58. Ibid. (3.4.7-8), 54-56.

### *Book Four*

Although the number four is arithmologically significant, there is little in this book—which describes the beginning of Augustine's career as a teacher—that reflects that significance.

### *Book Five*

The number five held little arithmological interest to the Christian Augustine, but as mentioned above, it was a “holy” number for the Manichaeans. Book Five thus describes Augustine's growing dissatisfaction and ultimate rejection of Manichaeism. This dissatisfaction originated with his meeting the famed Manichaean bishop Faustus, who Augustine found to be a rather poor scholar:

The interest which I had directed to the works of the Manichaeans was turned aside, and I was less hopeful of their other teachers, because, in the many problems which I had, that renowned master made this poor showing, I began to spend some time with him because of his own enthusiastic interest in that very literature which I was then, as a rhetorician, already teaching to the young men of Carthage. Thus, I read with him either the things he knew by repute and wanted to hear, or which I judged suitable to his natural bent. For the rest, any desire of mine to make progress in that sect was definitely killed when I came to know that man. . . .

Thus, that man Faustus, who had been for so many people a deadly snare, willingly and unknowingly began now to loosen that snare of mine in which I had been caught. For, Thy hand, O my God, in the mystery of Thy providence, did not abandon my soul.<sup>59</sup>

In the second-to-last paragraph in the book, he makes this rejection explicit, when he writes, “I decided that the Manichaeans were to be abandoned.”<sup>60</sup>

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59. Ibid. (5.7.13), 113.

60. Ibid. (5.14.25), 127.

### *Book Six*

Book Six describes the period of skepticism that followed Augustine's rejection of Manichaeism and preceded his conversion to Christianity. Although the number six is an important arithmological number, there is nothing in this book that reflects its perfection.

### *Book Seven*

The supposed arithmological significance of the preceding books has been somewhat lacking. However, beginning in this book, the enumeration of the *Confessions* becomes much more relevant to Augustine's arithmology. Here, in Book Seven, the influence of the Holy Ghost—symbolized by the number seven—is quite evident. This book describes Augustine's intellectual conversion; by the end of it, he writes:

So, with greatest eagerness, I seized the venerable writings of Thy Spirit and, above all, of Thy Apostle, Paul. Those difficult problems, on which at one time the text of his discourse seemed to contradict himself and not to be in keeping with the evidence of the Law and the Prophets, disappeared. The unified form of these chaste spokesmen became clear to me, and I learned to rejoice with trembling.<sup>61</sup>

This rather sudden understanding of Sacred Scripture, along with Augustine's newfound faith in general, can traditionally only be attributed to the actions of the Holy Ghost.

Even in the short excerpt above, a great majority of the Holy Ghost's seven gifts are represented: wisdom, (“became clear to me”), understanding (“difficult problems . . . disappeared”), fortitude (“with greatest eagerness”), piety (“venerable writings”), and the

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61. Ibid. (7.21.27), 192.

fear of the Lord (“rejoice with trembling”). Elsewhere, Augustine is counseled (“I had been made gentle by Thy books, and . . . my wounds had been touched by Thy healing fingers”),<sup>62</sup> and his knowledge of God, while still quite incomplete, is increasingly purged of pagan influence where necessary.

### *Book Eight*

Whereas Book Seven contains Augustine's intellectual conversion, Book Eight contains his moral conversion. In the sixth chapter of this book, he writes, “I shall tell and confess unto Thy name, O Lord, my Helper and my Redeemer, how Thou didst release me from the chains of desire for the pleasures of concubinage, by which I was most firmly bound, and from the bondage of worldly affairs.”<sup>63</sup> This sets the stage for his radical change of interests when, later in the chapter, he is famously told, “Take it, read it! Take it, read it!”:

And so I went hurriedly back to the place where Alypius was sitting. I had placed there the copy of the Apostle, when I had got up from the place. Snatching it up, I opened it and read in silence the first passage on which my eyes fell: 'Not in revelry and drunkenness, not in debauchery and wantonness, not in strife and jealousy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and as for the flesh, take no thought for its lusts.' No further did I desire to read, nor was there need. Indeed, immediately with the termination of this sentence, all the darkneses of doubt were dispersed, as if by a light of peace flooding into my heart.<sup>64</sup>

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62. Ibid. (7.20.26), 191.

63. Ibid. (8.6.13), 208.

64. Ibid. (8.12.29), 224-25. Augustine reads from Rom. 13.13.

Book Eight, particularly the above passage, tells of the completion of Augustine's conversion. This completeness leads the reader to consider this book as the octave, in that it represents a perfect happiness and a return to the beginning. Although Book Eight's subject is different from that of Book One, this final conversion fulfills Augustine's early praise of God: "Thou hast made us for Thee and our heart is unquiet till it finds its rest in Thee."<sup>65</sup>

### *Book Nine*

The number nine is not arithmologically significant by itself, but as the square of three could be said to represent the Trinity. However, there is little that suggests this is true for this book, which begins shortly after Augustine's conversion and ends with the death of Saint Monica, his mother.

### *Book Ten*

Book Ten describes Augustine's current state of mind, and can certainly be considered as representing "the perfection of our happiness" at the "knowledge of the Creator and the creature," as described above. Augustine begins this book by writing, "I shall know Thee, 'O Knower of mine, 'I shall know Thee even as I have been known.'"<sup>66</sup> A great deal of this book concerns psychology in general, and memory in particular; and others have written that "if the *Confessions* as a whole may be described as an ascent of

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65. Ibid. (1.1.1), 4.

66. Ibid. (10.1.1), 263. Augustine quotes from 1 Cor. 13.12.

the mind to God, then Book Ten is a microcosm of the whole work.”<sup>67</sup> There is, again, the famous passage in this book in which Augustine states his love of God, exclaiming, “Late have I loved Thee, O beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved Thee!”<sup>68</sup> Certainly, the most perfect happiness available to a Christian is that happiness which comes from loving God.

### *Book Eleven*

The concept of time, especially as it relates to the eternal God is discussed in this book. There is, however, nothing that gives this book arithmological significance.

### *Book Twelve*

Book Twelve is a commentary on the first two verses of the Book of Genesis: “In the beginning God created heaven and earth. And the Earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved over the waters.”<sup>69</sup> The totality of God's creation, represented by the number twelve, is therefore the subject of this book. Augustine acknowledges this when he asks, “Whatever it is, where did it come from but from Thee, from whom all things are, in so far as they are?”

### *Book Thirteen*

It is clear that Augustine desires to return to the beginning with this last section—that is, the last three books—of the *Confessions*. In the first paragraph of Book Eleven,

67 Van Fleteren, 231.

68. *Confessions* (10.27.38), 297.

69. Gen. 1.1-2 (Douay-Rheims Version).

he repeats the words from Psalm 95 with which he began Book One: “Thou art great, O Lord, and greatly to be praised.”<sup>70</sup> Book Thirteen, which completes Augustine's commentary on the first thirty-one verses of Genesis and includes a discussion on the nature of the Holy Trinity, can therefore be considered an octave, in the casual sense of that word which suggests a return to the beginning. (Note, too, the similarity in the construction of seven and twelve; since a proper octave is one greater than the former number, it does not seem misguided to consider thirteen to be an octave, albeit an informal one, as well.) This is evidenced also by the subject of these final three books: the act of creation described in the Book of Genesis, the very beginning of measured time. In Book One, Augustine writes:

Grant unto me, O Lord, to know and to understand whether first to invoke Thee or to praise Thee; whether first to know Thee or to invoke Thee. But, who invokes Thee without knowing Thee? For, he who knows Thee not might invoke another being in Thy stead. Or, art Thou rather invoked in order that Thou mayest be known?<sup>71</sup>

Book Thirteen begins with him stating:

I invoke Thee, O my God, my Mercy, who hast made me—Thou didst not forget even when Thou wert forgotten. I invoke Thee into my soul, which Thou dost prepare to receive Thee through the desire that Thou inspirest into it. Do not abandon me as I invoke Thee now, Thou who didst repeatedly instruct me by many sorts of calls, so that I might listen from afar off and be turned back, and call upon Thee as Thou wert calling me.<sup>72</sup>

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70. ~~Ibid. (1.1.1), 3~~; (11.1.1), 327.

72. Ibid. (13.1.1), 407.



Indeed, a great many of the rhetorical questions with which Augustine began the *Confessions* are answered by these final books—especially Book Thirteen—that consider the Creator-creature relationship.

Before concluding this essay, another passage in Book Thirteen deserves attention. In his discussion of the Holy Trinity, Augustine addresses God concerning man, “Thou dost teach him, now that he is able, to see the Trinity of unity and the unity of the Trinity.”<sup>73</sup> That is, God teaches man to see three in one and one in three. Although the Roman numerals which would have been familiar to Augustine (I, III, XIII) do not make the relationship between these numbers and the enumeration of the book quite so clear as do the Arabic numerals (1, 3, 13), it is still quite possible that he intended to make Book Thirteen a construct of the “one in three.” Consider how thirteen is represented on an abacus—an instrument with which Augustine would have been familiar—with one counting bead in the X column and three counting beads in the I column. In any case, while such a passage is generally unrelated to the arithmological structure of the rest of the *Confessions*, it nonetheless suggests that such a structure is possible.

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73. Ibid. (13.22.32), 437.

## V. Conclusion

Throughout his writings, Augustine defines a breach between the empirical certainty and mathematics and the subjective aspirations of faith in God. Certainly, in his *Confessions*, he recognizes an undeniable presence of his belief in God, but personal faith does not always translate into philosophical truth. Mathematics appears to defeat these doubts. As we have seen in our examination of Augustine's writings, the numbers one, three, four, six, seven, eight, ten, eleven, twelve, forty, fifty, and one hundred fifty-three, as well as squared numbers, assume metaphysical and theological meanings. The empirical, then, reflects the philosophical, thereby linking the transitory, subjective world of humankind with the eternal, immutable reality of the divine. Changing perceptions and paradigms may puncture this design, but this arithmology explains, at least in part for Augustine, the relationship between divine Creator and earthly creation.

The structure of Augustine's *Confessions* conveys the reality of this arithmology. The relevance of numerical metaphors scattered throughout this text suggests such a relationship. Written in thirteen books, this autobiography may be divided into the first ten books and the final three books. Earlier, Augustine had noted that ten represents the relationship between Creator and creature and is symbolic of law. Thus, as we have seen, the text recounts an ascent to God that culminates Augustine's perception of a law binding man and God, and assuring a perfect happiness. The metaphysics of time and space culminates in Augustine's depiction of man and his relationship with God in Book Thirteen.

Even if Augustine did not, in fact, desire the enumeration of the books in his *Confessions* to have any numerical significance, a proper understanding of the work depends upon the acknowledgment of this return to the beginning—that is, a return to God. Nonetheless, when compared to the arithmology developed in Augustine's other volumes, the structure of the *Confessions* does indeed suggest a numerical significance. This is only proper for Augustine, who viewed the science of numbers as a reflection of a great divine order. The *Confessions* is above all a work of divine praise, and there can be little doubt that Augustine desired to render this praise in a manner befitting its recipient.

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